



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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COMPARISON OF MAJOR AND MINOR PARTIES

By: Kristin Sullivan, Chief Analyst

You asked for a comparison of major and minor parties with respect to (1) party formation, including the filing of party rules; (2) ballot access; and (3) nominating procedures.

SUMMARY

State law establishes uniform requirements for political party formation. Any group of voters can form a new political party when 25 people establish a party designation committee and apply to the Office of the Secretary of the State to reserve a party name.

State law establishes different requirements for major and minor political parties concerning ballot access and nominating procedures. Both must demonstrate a certain amount of public support to earn party status and thus, ballot access, but the thresholds differ.

Major parties may nominate candidates to any state, district, or municipal office. A party is considered major if (1) its candidate for governor received at least 20% of the total votes cast for that office at the last gubernatorial election or (2) its enrolled membership, as of the last gubernatorial election, was at least 20% of the total enrollment in all political parties in the state. A minor party, on the other hand, can nominate candidates for a particular office only if its candidate received at least 1% of the total votes cast for that office at the last regular election.

Major parties nominate candidates according to a set calendar and specific statutory procedures, including town committee member selections, convention delegate selections, conventions, endorsements, and primaries. Minor parties nominate candidates in the manner provided by their party rules, and they are not subject to a primary.

POLITICAL PARTY FORMATION

A political party is created by a party designation committee. When at least 25 registered voters form a party designation committee, they must sign and file a written statement with the secretary of the state applying to reserve a party name. The statement must include the offices for which candidates may petition for nomination. Each office listed must have at least one signer who is eligible to vote at an election for that office. The statement must also include the party designation or name which:

1. can be no more than three words and no more than 25 letters;
2. cannot incorporate the name of any major party;
3. cannot incorporate the name of any minor party entitled to nominate candidates for any office appearing on the same election ballot;
4. must be different from any other reserved party designation currently in effect; and
5. must not include the words “none,” “unaffiliated,” “unenrolled,” or similar words.

The statement must also list the names of two people authorized to sign the party’s statements of endorsement and nomination certificates.

When the secretary of the state determines that the statement complies with all requirements, she reserves the party name. Once a name is reserved, it does not expire unless there is an election at which no candidate appears for the office(s) named in the party statement. In this case, the name expires the day after that election ([CGS § 9-453u](#)).

After receiving the designation, the party can then attain major or minor party status if it meets certain support thresholds in an election (see below).

Party Rules

The law requires both major and minor parties to file their state party rules, and any amendments to them, with the secretary of the state at least 60 days before a candidate's name may appear on the ballot. Major parties must additionally file rules with their state central committee. Minor parties must file local party rules with the town clerk in the applicable municipality. Otherwise, they are subject to any state party rules on file with the secretary.

Major party rules must cover the method for nominating party-endorsed candidates and electing town committee members. Minor party rules must cover the method for nominating candidates ([CGS §§ 9-374](#) and [9-375](#)).

BALLOT ACCESS

By law, a “major party” is one whose (1) candidate for governor received at least 20% of the total votes cast for that office at the last gubernatorial election or (2) enrolled membership, as of the last gubernatorial election, was at least 20% of the total enrollment in all political parties in the state ([CGS § 9-372\(5\)](#)).

A “minor party” is one that is not a major party and whose candidate for the office in question received, under the party designation, at least 1% of the votes cast for the office at the last regular election ([CGS § 9-372\(6\)](#)).

Thus, minor parties, unlike major parties, attain their status and ballot access on a case-by-case basis and cannot nominate candidates to those offices for which they do not have the status. Major parties, on the other hand, may nominate candidates to any state, district, or municipal office. (A candidate who is not nominated by a major or minor party may secure a place on the ballot by filing a nominating petition pursuant to [CGS §§ 9-379](#), [9-380](#), and [9-453a](#) to [9-453u](#).)

NOMINATING PROCEDURES

Major Parties

State law specifies nominating procedures for major parties covering town committee member selections, convention delegate selections, conventions, endorsements, and primaries.

Generally, members meeting in a caucus endorse town committee members, who may be subject to a primary. Town committee members or caucus members endorse delegates to the nominating convention; endorsed delegate candidates are subject to a primary. Once selected, delegates vote to endorse a candidate for each office at a convention. If the party-endorsed candidate is not challenged by a candidate who received at least 15% of the vote on any roll call at the convention, that candidate is the nominee. If there is a challenge, the candidate faces a primary and the winner of the primary is the party nominee ([CGS § 9-381](#), et seq).

For more information on major party nominating procedures, see OLR Report [1994-R-0098](#).

Minor Parties

Minor party rules, not state law, set the manner for nominating candidates. The statutes require only that (1) nominations be certified and filed with the secretary of the state or town clerk, depending on the office, no later than the 62nd day before the election and (2) meetings to nominate candidates be noticed with the secretary or the town clerk, depending on the office, and published in a general circulation newspaper ([CGS §§ 9-451](#), [-452](#), and [-452a](#)).

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